

Nixie

('Nixchen')

a contribution

on the psychology of the upper class daughter

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F I R S T L E T T E R

*Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl, Berlin,
Nettelbeckstrasse.*

My dear old Mephisto!

Truly, I don't know how I come to be writing to you especially today when I'm in my lovely Holy Feast Days-and-daffodils mood, because in actual fact I was furious with you, furious and disgusted and somewhat saddened after our last get-together in Berlin, when, with a glass of chilled champagne in your hand and in the company of delightful native Berliners you let me know loud and clear that your views regarding a certain topic were very much at odds with my own.

And you know it's a subject in which I'm a deep-rooted and obstinate idealist, pure and simple. So I ask you, sceptic and realist that you are, this: when all is said and done, what is the value of life--of all the work we do, of my grafting away here at the back of beyond, of the pursuit of fame, of the ability we have within us to derive pleasure from God's beautiful external world--what is the value of all this if we can't tell anyone of it, if there's no gentle, loving, lively, sympathetic fellow mortal to call one's own.

Yes, the dear women!--and you can say whatever you wish, and recount as many of your experiences as you want--often that's what makes me sorry for you. I maintain that only women can make the lives of us men worthwhile. There are angels among them--sweet, innocent flowers, a thousand times better, cleverer, and more refined than we are--sent straight from Heaven so that we down here in the dust can have an idea of what it's like above.

Laugh now if you want at the romanticist, at Thor, at Parsifal! (being a Thor is too splendid!). To be brief, dear old friend, notwithstanding your bitter overtones,--I am happy, indescribably, boisterously, jubilantly, deeply and blissfully happy!--I'm in love.

There you have it. In your case, when I mention the very word, I feel I'm expressing something close to a profanity. Do you actually know what love is, I mean love that is truly vital, is good, happy and strong? But then, you're the great authority on the human heart, are you not, the sworn-in expert witness in cases of love, the incomparable vivisector of emotions? You know a great deal, much more than your poor country squire and rural Pylades here. About love, though, you know nothing.

But then, how can you possibly have any knowledge of it? All you've done has been to roam around streets in the electric light, you, the idolised champion of the boudoir, renowned among the twenty-seven women whom the Madames of establishments have put at your disposal, women you're well acquainted with, whom you depict, as you would no other, as 'tigresses with the desires of madonnas', 'the sentimental Messalina, prostitute in her heart and in her phantasy', which in my eyes are worse than the streetwalkers with their open lewdness and vulgarity, which needs no Eau de Lys, no pre-Raphaelite robe arranging.

You know, whenever I've got to the end of a book and cast my eyes over its green, sleek, lizard-skin binding,

with corners and scrolls worked in ultra-modern style, and displaying the disturbing half-woman, half-Sphinx emblem, I, here in my old, smoke-filled den, surrounded by pictures devoted to deer and to the former Prussian kings with their old soldiers standing to attention below them, O wouldn't I love to chuck the book at the wall and dash outside. Fresh air! Trees! Smell of the earth! Nature, truth, purity, they're still here!

---And yet she's no lily of the field, nor did she appear in the forest beside a murmuring spring: she came into flower, a wondrous blue flower, within the city, with that morass, that sea of stone, about her. What could be more different? Seventeen years old! Sweet seventeen!--still half child, half maid. It's the most delightful age. I don't care for the 'young ladies' who've already spent three winters out and about socially, and had their shoulders viewed by every flashy character and had their naturalness besmirched by dull, flattering remarks. Each male eye that has desired them, has left them with a stain.

No, my darling is not like that. I am the first one, the lucky unsuspecting hunter who is the first to discover edelweiss on the steep mountain face. I mean that literally. You'll remember Partnach Gorge. You were so

lazy you even let slip the opportunity to climb good old Zugspitz, and from the terrace in Eibsee you followed my progress through a telescope. That was where I came across her. She was by herself, her parents had gone up onto the rim. She'd felt confident. She, this cheeky, little Berliner, had wanted to go walking in the gorge itself. There she stood, pressed against the enormous wet rockface, pale and shivering, with her little frock nervously raised, among the roaring, rollicking streams and the fine spray that drenched her tiny, dainty parasol so that it looked like a sodden rag.

I led her. How anxiously she made her way along, step by little step, holding onto my long alpenstock!--and so trusting. By now she'd gathered her courage. And she knew that the tall, rough-looking man in the brown loden cape would guide her safely through the frighteningly huge labyrinth of rocks and watercourses. It may well be nothing more than a wonderfully savage work of nature, but it's a place that often affords the pleasure of being, strong, of being a man, and, by the same token, of holding onto and protecting something so small and weak and tender, something that with a smile can twist you round its little finger.

What else can I tell you? I introduced myself. I managed

to speak with her parents. By not rushing things and by exercising prudence (as is the way with us northerners) I succeeded bit by bit in becoming an accepted member of their little circle, which has made things all the more cordial. She has two older sisters, both married. There's a brother, a lieutenant with the T... Dragoons. Mathilde is the youngest. 'Mathilde' suggests openness, purity, bygone German Empresses, blondness and ladylike qualities. The family all have charming names: Elizabeth, Magdalene. The Privy Councillor father, is a Prussian official of the old school, somewhat reserved and tight-lipped, a gentleman from tip to toe. The mother, a typically German woman, lively, motherly, dextrous. Everything about her is neat, not a thing out of place, nothing vague. I never knew a mother, and I feel it all the more, doubly so; this woman has my whole heart. And Mathilde--I hate names that are shortened. I call her Mathilde, not Tildchen or Tilly and definitely not the English-unGerman Mattie, Maudie,--Mathilde suits her best. Little crown of blond plaited hair, blond eyebrows, skin that has the freshness and fragrance of a rose petal. I'm sent into raptures by a woman's beautiful complexion. To me its a symbol of inner purity. Each blameless stirring of the heart showing beneath the milkwhiteness of innocence.

And she's very much a child still! It's almost a sin. I've asked Frau von B. to say nothing to her yet. I want to woo her. Leaf by leaf I'd like to reconstruct the bud which she is, thoughts, heart, mind, until she is mine, body and soul! What a thought! What a responsibility! I take it upon myself reverently, almost hesitantly. What can such a young creature know of the world, of life, of all that constitutes the nature of humanity. That the Lord made heaven and earth in seven days, that Frederick the Great used a walking-stick when he went out, that a certain Goethe wrote a certain 'Faust'. My task will be to point her in the right direction. How easily things in the world that puzzle a little head resolve themselves when that head leans safely against a faithful, loving breast!

That's why I'm so pleased that Mathilde never went to boarding school. I hate the idea of assortments of children being heaped together, away from home, in some uncaring establishment where supervision is inadequate and where bad elements cannot fail to be present. I was educated in the country, all on my own, and have always felt it an advantage. Hence, whenever you've mocked my being 'pure Thor', I've not gone to the trouble of correcting you. She, along with the daughters of selected families, for short periods enjoyed private tuition. Her dearest friend, the daughter of a retired general, is a

jolly, dark-eyed little chatterbox. They're almost inseparable, and you can tell they're near by their wonderfully delightful non-stop whispering and giggling about a thousand and one trifles, a new dress, a passion for a dead poet or an adored teacher. . . . How infinitely touching this simplicity really is! For me there's something holy about it. I pray that I may match it. I even test myself, my thoughts, my words. I want my very eyes to be wary lest I rouse her too early, or cause her any disquiet, she, my lily bud, my elfin child!

Laugh at me! Shrug your shoulders! Put on your most mocking Mephisto face for this man, this ass, this idiot, who, in a seventeen year old child, has found a treasure, a crown, a redemption!

I am happy!

Yours,
Achim.

S E C O N D L E T T E R

*Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow, Templin bei Rathsdorf,
Kreis Juterbog in der Mark.*

Dear Parsifal

In response to your yesterday's epistle.

I've neither smiled nor put on a mocking face. I
recognised the fat envelope, the 'Semper idem' mark, the
closely written pages of a Grove League boy.

But I didn't smile. I just gave a sigh! Will this man ever
grow up! I had quite a job on my hands rescuing him from
the powerful clutches of an ageing, pious widow; now he's
fallen for a seventeen year old, a seventeen year old
Berliner, a Privy Councillor's daughter!-Good grief, man!
The gods are out to destroy you.

I recognise the description. I'm used to seeing them,
dozens of them, on the tramway between the
Brandenburg Gate and Savigny-Platz, sometimes with a
schoolbag, and maybe a bread roll; I see them peering and
giggling, on their way to meet someone at the
confectionery shop, reading Tovote and Maupassant in the
lending library where youths blush, and dreaming of
separate bedrooms, old rich husbands and gentlemen
callers who are embassy attaches.

'Disgraceful of him! The pessimist!' you'll say, and then there will follow a whole philippic against modern art and the contaminators of public taste.

My dear boy! At one time I too had principles. I don't know if they were as fine as yours. But they were just as sincere. I don't have them any more. Not a single one. I just looked and marvelled. I still do, occasionally. To that scepticism I humbly bow my my mephistophelian pate: life! you're still the annoying comedy I thought you were, and I, Hans Herbert Grondal, the old, trained comedian and comedy writer.

So, yes, of course, I do have to laugh!

The descriptions you give: plaited coronet, blue eyes, tenderness, blondness. A Privy Councillor's daughter from . . . Do you recall taking me to task over my adventures, and being filled with indignation, and accusing me of phantasising and practising sinister arts of seduction?

Now, on the following occasion you'll at least have to admit that I can't be blamed for what came about, being totally innocent as well as asleep. ('You know the sort of friends he has, etc.')

Well, about four o'clock in the afternoon I was lying in the arms of Morpheus as peacefully as a newborn babe when Martin announced two lady visitors.

Martin is not the best person to have around at such times. He adopts a formality that's somewhat priestlike, and assumes the air of an officiant opening the holy of holies.

Recently my dear, old, hefty sister Julie paid me a visit. She lives in Munich and applies herself to the noble art of painting, besides being quite the beastliest, jolliest, most honest baggage in the world, with an avowed aversion to corsets and to anything that's analogous to corsets in the moral life. Throughout the meal a grandiose Martin served us with a discreet solemnity which began to put a damper on things. As well as having the friendly, easy-going ways of the southerner Jule is very witty, and she loves to see that wit appreciated even by lesser gods. Martin didn't bat an eyelid. Every now and then she would cast an almost sheepish sidelong glance at his smooth, impenetrable expression.

After dinner came coffee. Every now and again Martin flitted about, not making a sound. In the drawing room all

the blinds were down and the curtains drawn—note that it was three o'clock in the afternoon. The lamps shone through red silk shades, solemn and subdued like church candles. Julie laughed and talked without any inhibition. She smoked her pipe, using tobacco she'd cut herself, and knocked back cognacs one after the other. Martin produced a small, softly radiant flame from the forehead of the undulating shape of a dancing female, and trickled liquid from the green fish-like form of a naiad, springing up from among reeds. Jule couldn't find her hat and her jacket overcoat. As a precaution Martin had removed both from the rail at the entrance and had hidden them behind an opportune easel that had on it Lambach's painting of Bismarck. Julie suddenly left her bedroom. It was already night in there. The bedclothes were turned back; the yellow silk cover drifted down to the floor. Leaning forward over the bedhead was a small electric light in the shape of an obliging Cupid. On the dressing table, methodically arranged, lay combs, curling tongs, long hairpins, both straight and wavy, and a silver shoe-button hook with a bone handle. Julie wore Dr. Lahmann sandals and kept her hair close-cropped.

'Listen--,' said that good old sister of mine, coming back through the door, which saw many comings and goings and which she now slammed shut, 'if that man had been there

in Paradise, the Good Lord could have saved himself an apple.'

It was then Martin brought me a message. You know that my weakness is being courteous towards the female sex. If you only knew what this courtesy has put me through. In my case, physically.

Anyway, I got to my feet, had a quick glance in the mirror, ran my hand over my moustache, ditto with my tie. The outer man was prepared and ready. My bachelor home always looks good. It's my pride and joy. I've cultivated Martin to my taste. Onward, then!

"Ladies, to what do I owe the honour of this visit?"

Two older schoolgirls, such darlings! One blond the other brown-haired, both sweet, saucy, and blushing scarlet. From good homes,—gloves, boots—plenty of soap and water. I saw all that straightaway.

"Are you really the famous Herr Grondal? We've read your book: 'Forbidden Fruit'. My friend and I just wanted to meet you."

It was the brown-haired one who spoke, cheekily exploiting her bold, bright eyes. The blonde one was coy, she had lowered her eyelashes.

"I'm very grateful to my book for enabling me to make such charming acquaintances. Ladies, won't you take a seat?"

They sat, both of them, of course, on the same chair. They giggled. The blonde one gave the brown-haired one vigorous prods to her knee and elbow.

Her response was quite bold: "My name is Kathinka Schnebeling and my friend's name is Isolde Schulze. We're crazy about modern literature. My friend is crazy about your books. She's even got a photograph of you. She keeps it with her."

"And now, of course, you're both disappointed—an old man with a bald head"

Renewed giggling. Going by all the shoving and elbowing, these little maids must have very solid bones.

"Our whole class is crazy about 'Forbidden Fruit'. We've all read it. All of it!"

The "all" is recounted breathlessly in rather short sentences. I play the moralist: "Yes, but actually at your age"? . . .

"Oh, I've already been to the Wintergardens with my cousin Hubi and we saw 'Sodom's End' without anyone knowing!"

"Your cousin Hubi is a lucky fellow. . . But wasn't your mother or your father aware of what you were doing?"

"Oh, Papa? He sits at home playing patience," (impossible to convey on paper the actual tone of her disdain for this commendable pursuit of the doddering old gentleman). "Itta"--what names these young things give themselves. It's all 'Issy', 'Cissy', 'Missy'--a mixture of cat miaows and baby babblings, as if a proper, respectable, Christian name couldn't possibly be just as proper and respectable as Yes and No--,"Itta wanted very much to come and see you, and so I came with her. Itta is mad about artists. I go most for officers, especially those in the Guard and

the Cavalry. "

"But Kitty!" . . .

Yes, the blond one! She really was the cutest thing.

I got Martin to bring wine and sweets. He did it all perfectly.

They nibbled like mice. They just sipped at the wine. All the while their eyes, positively burning with interest, travelled round the room. The studio photograph on my desk of the Empress in a low cut dress clearly disappointed them: "Oh, the Empress!" . . .

A few Bouchers made amends to some extent. They nudged each other and giggled. I'm sure they'd expected the whole wall to be full of naked females, all five Barrison sisters at least!

"Is it true you get love letters every day? That's what Olga Krohn says."

Olga Krohn is a charming young woman. I put on my manly

modesty: "It happens now and then . . like today . . that the fair pixie bestows her favour on a poor mortal."

"Yet you've had an awful lot of loves?"

"There's so much grace in the world."

"Surely there have often been times when you've been very unhappy?"

"Any number."

In the course of all this, they observed me like two little man-eating ogresses, wondering if I was about to unbutton my immaculate shirt front so they could see the traditional bleeding heart revealing itself through the great hole in the middle.

But enough of my modest and totally unromantic person . .

They were hugely forthcoming: cousin Hubi, grammar school boys, one student who was paying court to the blond girl . . . What one of them left out, the other supplied,-- the brown-haired girl always a little step ahead, the blond one helping things along . . . Susi Hausner and Litty Mehring and Daisy Grimme . . . Oh, that absolutely dreadful Daisy Grimme!

And the time I ventured simply to voice a purely technical query as regards 'opportunity' . . . I was told: yes, indeed, they had music lessons, courses, dressmaking as far as fittings. The system was working superbly. A whole secret connivance, all its factors blazingly obvious: the fear of losing pupils, of forfeiting custom.

I tell you, it was delightful, being with these two hot, cute little chicks!

The clock struck six.

The brown-haired one got up: "But now we must go."

"Already?"

Giving the blonde an encouraging nudge, the brown-haired one added: "You can always come again."

My turn!: "Should I look forward to that pleasure?" . . .

"I'll write to you," said the blonde, almost in a whisper.

I responded by silently kissing her hand. The silent hand kiss is remarkably effective, respectful, knowing, there is much that it conveys, yet it is silent! I recommend it to you.--

I must confess I was somewhat affected by it all.

(Am again in dire need of electric shock treatment to my back!)

That's more or less how our sisters end up. How they come to marry. How daughters are placed in the world and why the much maligned young folk come by and drop in again here.

That's your burning heart for you!

T H I R D L E T T E R

Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

You're now thinking that your poisoned arrow has hit the mark.

You're well short, you old poisoner of souls!

I simply took refuge with Mathilde. Whenever we have the reality in front of us, doubt fades away. The believer, before whom the Madonna has made a bodily appearance, has need of neither dogma nor logic. Fortunate is the man who has not once been filled with moral indignation.

----She is still her own true self, sweet and innocent.

However, there are times when I feel as if a shiver were passing through her slender form, a deeper breath, the presentiment of a Spring storm ahead with glorious, bright, warm sunshine.

We were sitting out on the balcony. Perhaps I was gazing at her with too much fervour.

She became confused. She was quiet.

The sweetness of silence! Do you know a lovelier

expression than that from Corialanus to his wife: 'My sweet silence!' Those words betray such unspoiled depths. They are totally inapplicable to a lot of folk, like you for instance. Only Nature has this silence—the sea—the sky—women . . .

I set about acquainting myself with her innocent daily tasks.

At home she has her own little duties, preparing the tea, doing the dusting, bringing Papa his breakfast cocoa. Also keeping her own things tidy herself, the little skirts and stockings, the little ribbons and embroidered handkerchiefs. Her mother has brought her up to be modest and capable in the home, as she herself is. Mathilde knows how to cook. She can even manage the iron all by herself. I find that delightful.

In addition she and her friend Katharina v. W. take a number of extra lessons. Languages, literature, music. They go to classes together. As often as not they'll go for a little walk. The two girls are inseparable. How they gossip and chatter!—all those innocent confidences, the delightful secrets of seventeen years.

Sometimes it almost pains me.

There must be so much we can't even guess at, so much that's beyond the comprehension of an ordinary, unpolished country-man like me, raised without a mother, without sisters, a bashful bungler when it comes to women.

And then again, there's nothing much we have we to offer by way of confidences.

For the time being there's my dear old Templin itself with all its memories, its beauties. Here on the Mark we have our own but it is an intimate, chaste beauty that reveals itself only to one who understands, to a friend, a lover, and then there's the endless beauty of God's world, Italy, Norway—the sea . . .

The trip to Partenkirch was the first journey she made. Well I'm thankful I'm rich and can lay before my darling so many beautiful things.

How amazed she'll be at the huge revelation of art, my little Berlin barbarian, who knows not a thing!

I want to read all my favourite books with her! Goethe,
Gottfried Keller, Storm.

She shall become a good patriot, share the hopes and
pains of the Fatherland, be proud of our proud great
House of Hohenzollern, of our wonderful old Bismarck.

It caused Mama to smile: "You're an excellent man, dear
Achim!"

I'm so glad she thinks me worthy of Mathilde.

Am I worthy of her?

That's the question that's on my mind a lot.

You know I've never led a dissipated life. Coarseness has
always repelled me, coarseness in men as well as in women,
and no false transfiguration, no impassioned sophistry,
can blind me to it. I'm often mocked on account of my
views and my Joseph-like steadfastness.

But really, how much stays with us from childhood, even a pure one, words, impressions, what one has merely seen or heard. What is my so-called honourableness compared with Mathilde's radiant unawareness and innocence. I tremble at the thought of any stain falling on it. I keep a check on what I say to her and how I look at her. I'm close to finding how to tone my voice down.

How tender and delicate are the little conversations we have together. I ask a question, and she answers: yes and no, as if she scarcely dare have any purpose that is not given to her, a purpose that is her own, one that her life will revolve round, one that is written on a pure lily-white leaf. May it please God to make me worthy of writing what should be written!

The other day later I had quite a shock.

When I called at the house about tea-time--I'm a welcome guest whenever I'm in Berlin--who was there but Frau von F. They see a lot of her. She's one of their circle. The Councillor's wife said it couldn't be helped, there was no one in sole charge. It possibly had to do with a kind of social 'esprit de corps'.

I'd say there's some truth in that. Oh how I detest the world's lax morals!

And Mathilde was in the room. Frau von F. spoke with her, commended her on what she was wearing, kissed her innocent brow. Yes, that woman with my treasure, my lilybud, my Madonna! But I understand her husband holds a high position. She is rich, kind, has her opinions.

I asked Frau v.B. not to allow Mathilde into the room when Frau v. F. was there. She had not intended it to happen.

I was very taken aback. My darling girl gave me a half-frightened look; what nasty mood, she must have thought, was tormenting her friend today. O if you only knew, Mathilde, that it's simply your purity that makes me tremble, nothing else, nothing in the world, because I have you! She seemed then to gaze in earnest. At times it looked almost as if she'd been weeping, out of her darling little fear, fond, innocent tears. Could it be something that at night in her narrow white bed occasionally entered her thoughts and kept her awake? Could it be that she also thought of me?

Another lovely thing.

Her eldest sister is expecting a child, that'll be the fourth. I heard them talking about the little outfits, blouses, beds, that would have to be seen to. Both women spoke quietly to each other. One could just catch the murmur of their affectionate, secretive voices, like the murmuring you hear before Christmas presents are given out.

Mathilde left the room to get a pair of scissors.

"The child has no idea," said Frau von B. with a smile.

I kissed her hands. How I adore this woman who has vouchsafed to me my treasure. One day when all is clear and bright, I shall, in like manner, truly restore her daughter to her as my wife, my jewel, my ray of sunlight.

F O U R T H L E T T E R

Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow.

My adventure is starting to interest me, more from the psychological aspect than the personal one. I've gone some way already. My habit of skilful dissection has come into play.

On Wednesday, a dainty little pink note, older schoolgirl's handwriting, upright, nervous, capricious: "Sir, expect me tomorrow at the same time. I'll be alone. Yours J."

I opened the door myself. It increased the mysteriousness and showed keenness and anticipation. There she stood, cheeks flushed, in her dark blue little dress and black astrakhan.

This time of course I kissed her.

You know I regard kissing as an art. Quite a few people never get the hang of it. You for example! There's everything in the kiss: it asks, it confirms—how far things can go . . . The whole of the coming melody of love lies in that soft, gentle placing of lips. That way nothing stupid and clumsy will eventuate.

She didn't object, didn't respond much, and didn't move. But her heart, half from fear, was hammering fit to

burst.

"Won't someone notice?"

I reassured her: "There's a photographer living on the floor above and when you meet anyone on the stairs they'll always think that's where you're going. The bedroom has a second exit which leads into the yard. Martin's as close as the grave."

She thought it over.

She let me kiss her again, this time a cute kiss from behind.

Then the moral assurances.

"You don't think it wicked of me then to have come here for 'this'?" (in parenthesis—have you ever met a woman who used 'for' followed by the genitive case? Don't trust her! She has Jaeger underwear and philosophises in bed.)

"Say: no. Truly, no! It's only because I've read your

books—and it's so dreadfully boring at home, and because you're so nice."

I say "Truly no", and kiss her, her white throat, and bite her earlobe.

Those little breasts of hers! white and firm and sugary, like halves of an apple! and that neck so finely set! Those little arms that slip round me like a snare and hold me in their clutch, thin, soft, strong as silken cords . . . I'm moved by the childlike qualities in her voice, alluring, plaintive. I've now even got a name for her. 'Nixie', the water-sprite, it's marvellously apt. It characterises the whole genre, wanton, impish, basically incapable. The fishtail!

Ice cold—that's what she is, despite all her protestations of love. They're too smooth: "I love you, Herri! I'm awfully fond of you. You're the most fantastically divine man there is." Has a nice ring to it, though.

But she never raises her voice, never makes a rude gesture, always the little lady, so clean, so white and gossamery, quite the cute, sweet little thing! I've never understood girls with a passion for quilted slips and for

the smell of black soap. I'm too much the aesthete for things like that.

Mind you, there's the psychological aspect, and that is simply priceless.

It's when she becomes the master and I'm the humble pupil. I'm amazed at what the brat knows. Where does she get it from?

She laughs: "We all know."

From what she tells me there's a whole underclass that we have no notion of, a harem-like world of little white boarding- school beds, where the girls sleep crammed close together. Lurid stories about servants, listening at keyholes, are popular; there's a playfully lascivious appetite for books and images. The very humour in those places can't be taken at face value, and giggling derives from the backyard as well as the Watteau-ish boudoir. She told me about an acquaintance of hers, a woman forty years of age and mother of umpteen children, whose husband waited on the steps with her suitcase and brolly ready when she and her lover from the circus ran off together right under his nose. It was the

brolly and the suitcase that had amused them and added laughter to their little bit of treacherous, innocuous bestiality.

She had brothers, cousins ... 'cousin' is a species that needs its natural history expanding. It's something like a brother but not quite and yet it's certainly not an outsider. It receives confidences without being impertinent. It isn't compromised nor is it under any obligation. Nature appears to have created something special, an intermediary being for these subtle, shadowy transitional stages, the services of a scout, someone to spy out the land . . . She's not not particularly explicit on that score. She's wary of me. Sometimes I sense the 'cousin' has been doing some groundwork. Somewhere and at some stage he will have had a hand in things. Try as you may, you'll never figure it out. In the beginning was the cousin. I give you that as a rule to remember.

She badgers me to tell her all I know about sexual behaviour. She's insatiable. Hers is the mind of a greedy little monster: rape, incest, perversion. Everything there is to know, everything that can happen. She treats it half as a religion, at least half. She stores whatever she learns. But there's something unwarranted and appalling in her idiotic, lopsided understanding. As for love's dart

coming straight out of the blue and lodging in the Achilles heel of the heart: "Darling, don't be so stupid!" she'll say. "It's so boring, I don't like it . . ."

She's interested in all details of my bachelor set up, my whippet, Martin, the bric-a-brac.

Much kissing between whiles.

Champagne doesn't appeal to her. She's not ready for it.

She wants everything to be playful, like a kitten that lets itself be kissed, petted, caught hold of . . .

But in things like coming across a snake, or the question of marriage, or the fear of getting hurt, the fear of a baby, that's when you see her practical side: "We're not a wealthy family. Else and Dada are married as well."

She doesn't have any illusions about marriage. What it comes down to is common sense and making due provision.

I wouldn't surprise me if she turned out to be a

really good wife.

When you come to think about it, though, are girls like her to be blamed? All that bogus, constrained education, and the secrecy. What have these little mites to hope for? A husband who doesn't appeal to them in the slightest, whom they cannot even choose for themselves, who can pay for them just as brutishly as if they were prostitutes. Is it to be wondered at if they wish to enjoy champagne bubbles while they can?

She may be a silly little thing and, like a lady of the harem, hasn't got ten pennyworth of brains in that empty head of hers, but she's going about things very cleverly and following her instinct.

--But if it should get out!" That's her worst fear, a sweet, horrifying fear. Completely spontaneously her little pea-brain has told her: "He's just the man. He'll know what goes on. He'll know about love." Then she giggles at the thought of all those stupid people, Papa, Mama, the people down below on the street—and her above them, alone with a degenerate bachelor in his apartment.

It gives her a deep thrill: "You're so immoral!" . . .

Then I kiss her again.

She lays her little arms round my neck, calls me her little angel, darling, sweetheart—and that she'll love me for ever and ever.

Little fibber!--Ah, they're all like that.

What is actually to be marvelled at is men's abiding stupidity, each thinking himself the one and only to have come by such admiration.

F I F T H L E T T E R

Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

There are times, you know, when I positively pity you, furthermore it occurs to me that I ought to convert you.

Mathilde would convert you. You would believe and go down on your knees as I do.

Whenever I step into that peaceful, well-ordered house, it's always the same. The parents agree with each other. Never a sharp word, never a difference of opinion. If, at first, her father stands on his manly principle, then this proper and prudent wife is very likely to yield, and perhaps wait for a more suitable moment for them to fix on the more practical proposal, a decision he understands to have been his own.

I've now got to know her brother, who, at the moment, is in post here, attached to the telegraph service. A born horseman, lively and brisk, whose views and opinions are splendid and honourable. What continues to hold Old Prussia together is giving an individual full rein every so often, as when he gets carried away by something and feels able, when I'm with him, to get it off his chest.

Naturally, I put my resources at his disposal, should the need occur, it being entirely between ourselves, brother and close friend. Am I not his brother, the brother of her brother?

He insisted on shaking my hand and pledged that the agreement between us was not to be simply empty words.

Mathilde brings sunshine into the house. She's familiar with all her father's fads, how much sugar he takes in his tea, and when he wants his lighter brought. When company is expected she will go and give her mother a helping hand with minor details. She'll decorate the table, lay the silverware, put out the glasses, maintaining always that quiet gracefulness of hers. How they all love her! And I love all of them because they all cherish my darling, and because I've never known what it is to have a family of my own, never known the sweetness of being among compassionate people with whom I have a spiritual affinity, and who belong to me as I to them. They shall all become mine.

I enjoy their very great trust.

Recently I was alone with her. It came about quite by chance.

She seemed to be growing anxious, as if she were vaguely aware that something remarkable was drawing near. I tried saying something of no particular importance,

though I would most gladly have fallen at her feet.

Now, just a small thing but it disturbed me exceedingly.

I've seen Mathilde's little room.

I had arrived at what was possibly a somewhat unusual hour. Social conventions are not my strong point. Frau von B. with a large white apron tied round her was busy in the house. "We've put up new curtains in Mathilde's little room."

Could she know what I was feeling? She was happy for me to stand in the doorway while she remained at the window, bunching up the white muslin. A little nest, all white on white. Above the bed Raphael's cherubs--a small bookshelf, 'A Woman's Love and Life,' Schiller's works, Ekkehardt, Irrlichter, a couple of Tauchnitz English language editions . . .

How can I even begin to be sufficiently sensitive, generous, chivalrous, not to ruin her gentle little world !

The second-eldest sister, Frau Buderus, has now returned

from the south. Her husband remains in Spa, taking the baths. She is very beautiful. A shade of melancholy makes her face all the more attractive. The marriage remains childless. All the riches and diversions of the world put together can't fill that void in a woman's heart.

The eldest sister and her husband, however, have been blessed with a happy event. Her husband is a captain on the General Staff; he's an extraordinarily efficient and assiduous officer.

They are having to economise. How I love this economising for the sake of love, these two good, steadfast people, who, despite the present demands on their lives and their company, have dared follow the call of their hearts.

I love women who are mothers with lots of children. It's such a beautiful symbol, the Madonna and Child, the true fulfilment of woman, the absolute fulfilment of life, before which, the whole sinful world kneels down and is redeemed.

Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow.

I could be a father-confessor, I have the talent for it. To me the entire family is like an open book. I see it all, every detail.

The mother, vain, ambitious, pushy, constantly on the move, striving with narrow means to pay for receptions and to cover the dress bills. Hence the never-ending grumbling and jibing you hear in the house. The topic in this family, morning, noon and night, is money. Every reception means a row. The father wants no more of it. He's old, weary, worn out. He'd be happy with five small rooms in Arnstadt or Eberswalde, taking up rose-growing. But he puts on his tail-coat and goes his way bowing and blundering. He's sure to end up head of department in a ministry.

Nixie, of course, takes her mother's side. Mama is a big woman. What Mama wants, Mama gets. And Mama is always right.

Fortunately she's free of her two older daughters. With the eldest there's a problem. Her engagement just drags on. Her young man is a distant nephew, but he had to think

of his career. Tears and scenes in the family. He was expected to keep his word until all was signed and sealed. Meantime they sit and suck their thumbs.

That's Mama's main worry. Even Nixie made a point of wrinkling her nose: "How can this be! Surely they can do something about him still not being appointed major." As to the why of the "something" that hadn't been done, she appeared to be in little doubt. The Privy Councillors couldn't care less, even when the discussion became heated.

The second-eldest daughter, Dada, was the beauty in the family. She stood out from the rest and at both official and family gatherings she knew exactly what to wear and what neckline to display. She and a cousin in the navy had enjoyed a certain interlude, but Mama had put a stop to it with just as much firmness as was needed. Dada's husband is an obnoxious, impotent wretch, but there's money there, lots of it. She has her compensations. The cousin in the navy has come into his own. Nixie tells me all that's going on: "You have no idea" . . . They have an apartment somewhere round here.

Dada has no regrets.

It's Nixie's brother who's mother's darling. Traditional wastrel, owes money, chases after women, including--much to Nixie's amusement--some on the Privy Council kitchen staff. There are constant scenes. The rich brother-in-law won't lend him a penny. Mama too has run up debts: "You know, it's sometimes unbearable in our house." That I can well believe.

Even Nixie has hooked herself a suitor, and at first go. She's trying him out. He's a rich landowner with a posh name.

He seems rather dumb . . . "And he's got such big hands! And he's not half as nice as you!" . . .

She actually shed tears, even though she's determined, of course, to have him. She'll be weeping again when she's holding her pre-nuptial tea-party with her girl friends.

Oh, women!

Poor Nature, where art thou?

She furnishes me with quite delightful details of how she made her catch.

"Of course, you have to act as though you were completely unaware. That's the main thing. Whenever he arrives, be completely amazed and take off like a hare. Mama will have been lying in wait for him the whole morning, and I will have put on my new blue blouse . . . Believe everything he tells you, don't ever ask him questions! (As if Aunt Otti hadn't already provided us with quite enough information as to what he owned and where he came from!). Mama always speaks to me as if I were a child still and should be away at school. At the same time, on his account, she's already been doing up all the rooms in the house. She thinks that when I'm married I'll slip some money to my brother. I'll do it straightaway. I've had enough of domestic poverty!"

There you are: Lucretia Borge and Goneril in pocket-size format !

However, what delights me most is the almost passionate way she has of stroking her prudish little hands across my head, and the forceful kisses she plants there in order to arouse herself. There are times now when she even kisses

me on the mouth: "I could die for you! Truly!"

I could almost believe her. So I put her to the test: "We could get married" . . .

Immediately she's Nixie again: "An artist like you! . . Look, he's a baron and frightfully rich. He has to present me at court, Mama says, and I'll be able to get all my clothes from Paris, like Dada. --One has to be sensible, my love."

At the time she was nibbling chocolates and looking like a small, white and very graceful Madonna.

I lay on the chaise-longue, amazed.

"But look, I do love you. You're my own true love. I'm yours."

She's terribly naive in such matters, hence her ability to turn really sentimental: "You're so irresponsible! And I love you so much. And there's nothing wrong about love."

She might well have got a good hiding.

But she's typical.

"Nixikins, why have you come to see me?"

She gave me a vague look, buried her little head in my neck and kissed me: "You're so immoral!" . . .

I gave her a tickle. Voilà.

Do you know what she reminds me of?

Modern craftsmanship going by the names of Tiffany and Koepping has produced the most delightful new kind of decorative glasswork. It's my passion. I've got a whole collection: goblets figuring lilies, tulips, tall sleek campanulas.

She likes them too. She holds them delicately between beautiful pointed fingers and lets them gleam in the sunlight.--

Previously all you would see would be white or red or blue.

And that's all the undiscerning eye still sees . . . But now it's possible to find all colours in them: purples, greens, all shimmering, dancing, veins, nerves . . .

The jolly things are expensive, though.!

So is she.

S E V E N T H L E T T E R

Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

I believe she's beginning to love me.

After all this time she must have sensed that my whole mind is focussed on her, that I want to live only because of her and only for her. Any woman, even the most innocent and guileless, will feel it.

Something in her is yielding. The great love that has penetrated her heart is tugging at her. She now speaks to me face to face. She's begun to see to things for me. I

have my place at table, my cup, and my serviette ring,
which she knows.

I have kissed her

My lips have touched those soft cool lips and brushed the
pink curve of her cheeks.

She flushed. I felt her quiver. The first kiss that a man's
mouth had imprinted on her. How immeasurably purer and
holier is that act for a woman than it is for a man.

An ugly episode came into my mind. The gardener's
daughter in Templin. I was still only a boy. It was
haymaking time and the smell of the hay lingered in the
evening stillness. The girl's lips were cool and her teeth
were white I kissed her . . .

I want to become worthy.

I am worthy already.

She is now my betrothed, though it hasn't been in the
newspapers yet. The thought of a formal congratulatory

reception with the aunts and female cousins terrifies me. You know how shy I am. Mama, gracious as ever, granted my request.

I see Mathilde every day now. She wears my ring. We use first names. I've not heard mine spoken since my mother died; I could hear her saying it.

She's still like a rosebud. I wouldn't want to frighten her. To me those awkward displays of affection in public that engaged couples shower on each other are obnoxious, they're all part of a shameful, lecherous game of dalliance with only one thing in mind. The edelflower opens up in one night, and that's exactly how it shall be. The veils will fall and my white, tender, virgin bride will present herself before the sacred mystery of life-creating love.

A young cousin, a law student, calls occasionally. Mathilde and he play the piano together. They use "Du" with each other, they laugh and go over things and names that hark back to the childhood they shared. I don't want to be jealous. It would be an affront to the innocence of these sweetest and dearest of creatures.

But I found myself kissing her fiercely and passionately.

Looking back it was a disastrous thing to have done.

I spoke with Mama. We fixed an early date for the wedding. It's for the best, even though she's very young.

"You're such a good, high-minded person; you are indeed," said Mama when she gave her consent.

Am I good? I want to be.

My wife will never experience a love other than a holy one that is itself a sacrament--a love that merges earth with heaven. Never shame! For the love of God no shame!

I'm friendly with Fritz Ronne. I'll invite him. I expect he'll come up in the hunting season to shoot deer.

He's a dear, prudent, tactful fellow.

Trust is love's firm anchor that reassures at the deepest level.

It's the beauty and nobility of marriage that distinguishes it from the fleeting amusement of

passionate affairs, hence I do not envy the gods of old.

E I G H T H L E T T E R

Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow.

I've had her in bed with me. I've seen her naked.

It came about so perfectly naturally. When she came I was laid up in bed with a dislocated knee. It amused her being in a man's bedroom with the white wooden picture frames, the big-mirrored wardrobe, the open fire, the lowered curtains that allowed one to make out faint sounds coming from the courtyard below.

First she asked me for a bit of loving, quickly adding: "But not that, darling . . . absolutely not that . . ." She was clearly alarmed. Girls have a totally exaggerated notion of our lack of self control. In those little stories-for-girls books we men are ogres, wild beasts that will pounce on any female, beautiful and ugly alike, young and old, a different one each night, and revel in hideous debauchery.

Yet they love it. It titillates them . . . The lust for power of your everyday, common and garden Bismarck that is the torment of decadent woman and her times, requires an avowal of impotence before the crowd-rouser can take action.

Daintily, like a little boarding school girl undressing for bed, she placed her clothes neatly, in orderly fashion: bodice, petticoat, knickers, garters, and lastly her hairpins beautifully arranged on the bedside table.

All the time she jabbered away. She wanted to know with perfect certainty what part of her was pretty. This must have often been discussed. "My arms are still too thin; well, in a couple of years they will be. I've got a small, brown beauty spot here. It's quite cute. Elizabeth has beautiful shoulders. With Dada it's her feet--she has a mark on the side-- it's horrid! You should see Kathi! She's wonderfully pretty, all plump and white. But she knows it too."

She's lying quite close to me, naked, soft, gossamery . . . I kiss her. I hold her delicate, smooth body. I press her to me . .

She likes doing things with a kind of drowsy sensuality. Perhaps she's thinking of her cousin. "Not at all, darling, you're mature and sensible" . . .

I have no feelings for her, absolutely none. Perhaps there's a kind of casual physical comfort.

Sometimes I'm rough with her. I use harsh words. I scold her. Then she gets timid and imploring. Finally she blubs like a child.

The fact is, she will try to provoke. Threatening her stimulates her. It more or less gives her the feeling she's putting her hand in the lion's mouth.

Occasionally she loses faith in me: "You don't love me at all. You're toying with me. Oh I can tell! I can tell." Then she goes all jealous or tries to get me angry.

The little rascal! If she thought I'd shoot myself on her account, I believe she'd annoy me all the more.

Then she could start her genteel, respectable married

life with the delicious feeling of being a murdress.

Now and then I try to scare her: "Suppose I were to send you away and betray you?"

She snuggles up to me even closer and weaves her soft limbs through mine. Her eyes when they're searching for mine are like little stars: "You won't do that; you're much too decent, too much a gentleman, my dear sweet Herr!"

How clever she is. Little Fishtail!

And, yes, there are times when I think I should talk to her seriously, hurt her feelings, get her to see the whole sorry picture, the whole shameful deception . .

Then she might change and become a wife.

Ah, the big, noble wife that draws her child to her breast and is the silent mother of the whole howling, cowardly mockery of a society.

But then aren't we very much the same--half-men--gentlemen--at the expense of our manhood?

Am I not a Nix, a male water sprite, who holds in his arms
a sweet, young, warm woman and doesn't take her with a
brute force driven by the elemental force of my passion?

What have we turned into if the feelings that gave us life
become merely fooling around and fanciful choosing.
Eating fine foods that costs us our teeth.

Ah that great, noble, genuine nation working, loving,
begetting children in their life's task to transcend death
and those that have died.

My heart tightened in its bitterly painful yearning for
deliverance. I took firm hold of her. I was breathing more
heavily . . .

She murmured: "Darling, no baby! You're not going to do
anything to me. All right?" . . .

N I N T H L E T T E R

Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

I am trying to prepare her for marriage.

It's terribly important--in the hour of need and in the hour of death . . body and soul . . a life together to create new life.

Can there be anything greater and more wonderful! No, I do not envy the gods. Mortal and full of need, human kindness ennobles us and makes marriage immortal and divine. No solitary Prometheus facing the wrath of the gods, but the husband holding firmly his wife's hand as the world beneath him collapses!

Only through marriage does one become human. The husband, the wife, they are partial entities, incomplete, solitary atoms wandering in space. . Following on from the father the mother effects their completion, linking them to the universal, to what is great, right, immortal.

I give a lot of thought to matters that we can only start to ponder by way of philosophy, but women's instincts are sure and come from their feelings!

How superior they are to us! They simply pursue their aim to be wife, to be mother, in the knowledge that it's their whole life's accomplishment, and is the whole significance of gender.

I try to interest her in my earlier life, my childhood, in what impressions and events influenced my development. I make no secret of my mistakes and shortcomings. She should see me as I really am.

It's hard. But it's only what I deserve. Thus the husband confesses to his blameless wife. And his wife is his salvation, makes complications smooth and turns his fevered passion into a noble one.

She hasn't much to say. I hold her hand. She doesn't withdraw it. I'm not ashamed to say that recently I covered it with my tears.

She was concerned.

No, Mathilde, good devout Mathilde, I want to be good!
You shouldn't shrink from me.

These days, whenever I return to my bachelor abode Grumke will have laid out my evening meal and that's the time I picture to myself our future life together. She's seated at table in my mother's place, her eyes following everything as she quietly indicates and motions where things should go .

Not that she is involved in any way. I'm by no means impressed by these so-called "good housewives" and their ceaseless, abrasion-resistant kitchen mobilisations. Their day, their very existence is given over to preparing everything so well that it is sufficiently splendid and cheerful for everyone.

I'm glad then that I'm rich, that her little soft hand needn't become hard and brown, that this delicate slender back won't become bent from being occupied at the stove or from tedious mending.

Not that I disregard those women. I admire them! Their hard hands move me. They're the best part of our national workforce. The government should raise a monument to them as it does for heroes.

But I'm thankful that our love is good and strong and has no need for outward show.

I wonder if she actually has any idea of this. I never ask her. Her sweet trust! It's my belief that were I as poor as a church mouse she'd follow me just as willingly and as faithfully.

I'm much comforted by that. I shan't be giving her any large present. I always keep things simple--you know me. Recently, seeing there was no porter to hand, I carried my suitcase from the station myself. Maybe she now thinks her darling is a poor man.

Ah, would I had a kingdom, just so I could lay it at her feet. I can see her holding my head with both her hands: "What is a kingdom to me! Your love is far, far greater than any kingdom."

I am fortunate in being so well off. And I've always kept my emotions in check. I shan't be like a friend of mine who, the evening before his wedding, came up with the first names of thirty-five women he'd carried in his heart. She still hasn't learnt how to distinguish real love, to recognise the wicked distortions in sophisticated novels that have turned what is natural into something unnatural and even beyond that. But she has not yet become bitter and prudish like many a nice young woman who do themselves no good withdrawing into themselves

on account of the brutality and cynicism there is in the world. Like a queen my beloved receives the royal gift, full and whole.

Imagine spring in our old park when the lilac's blooming and the laburnums are heavily laden with honeyed clusters.

We'll have many visitors--her dear Mama, my sisters, their children. It'll bring our old house back to life.

She'll stand with me beside Mother's grave under the spruce tree. Mother will be smiling at us.

Perhaps

Oh, Harry, can there be so much happiness in this poor, confined world!

.... To be a father! One's own, created by her, the dearest thing, my own, born in the sweetest pains for me! ...

What would life be without it? Would she want to leave the pain, the fear, the death throes at this climax in life?

And we don't kneel before this Being from the high
heavens and kiss its feet as the catholics do with their
Madonna!

Men are egoists. What would they be if there was a dear,
gentle Being to remind them that there was something
higher than power and ambition--something that Caesar's
and Alexander's glory could not outweigh--that simple
quiet, holy act of women suckling love.

TENTH LETTER

Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow.

Time to talk sensibly about your marriage.

It goes without saying that one has to get married--it's a
sinecure, and there's the care. She doesn't give it
another thought. An old maid is an old maid because she's
ugly, or can't get anyone, or is too hard to handle. That's
not her. She's proud of the fact that she's so soon
landed someone who is rich, and it makes her girl friends
envious.

They're annoyed and this annoyance plays a big role--the closer they are, the more vexed they become. Our gender equivalents go by the names of honour and glory. But with the ladies, no admiration! They don't know the meaning of the words, and they've no wish to. Their friends' achievements in art or in a vocation leave them cold, though not so with money, dresses, men.

And actually it's good for them to feel the tingle of jealousy running down their spine. What tickles makes the nerves prickle. Other than that it's nonsense.

The fact that she'll be expected to devote herself to a husband she can't work out means not a thing to her.

I believe that generally speaking we overestimate women's part. Or is it that their thousands of years of servitude have made them dull and resigned?

A man without appeal?--As a lover, never! As a husband, why not?

What women want from love is finesse and passion, hence they fall for artists, men with a fine sense of beauty who can go on thrilling them. At least, when women make love they do it as a duty.

They dread having a baby. They're appalled at the thought of it--the pains, the ugly bump, the sagging breasts . . . "Elisabeth's bulge is spoiling her whole figure . . ."

Elisabeth's 'bulge' worries her.

" . . It's better if there are a lot of you then you can hire a nurse. Babies look so cute in white lace and pink ribbons . . ."

This is a key issue and it persists for a very long time! They're thinking of the servants and the carriages with liveried footmen for when they attend court balls.

"He's going to have to stay with me here in Berlin the whole winter."

"And if he doesn't want to?"

" Husbands always do what they want. Papa will even do what Mama wants."

At the same time a little sly cruel smile emerges on her rosy lips.

Oh, yes, he'll do what she wants.

And you can still find dunderheads who still have faith in the superior will of the male.

Not so the French: 'What woman wants, God wants.' When you come down to it, they're more honest by far. With the hectoring German it's the old crude barbarian in him.--And then our women are cleverer. There's just the hint of a smile on Thunelda's face as she watches Hermann, befuddled with meth, spearing bison.

Also women have an over-abundance of resources at their disposal-- known simply as being in love. And when that's exhausted what you usually find is a woman ruling the roost.--When she's in love the female is obsequious. She lusts for him: the tiger cat that likes to be stroked.-- It's a running battle. The tears, the purrs. The nerves give way. Alexander and Caesar lower their eyes before her frowzy face, the silent choked-down meal, the constant proximity of someone swollen with reproach, detested.

Nothing amuses me more than seeing a person of this sex striving after political office or a high position in business. They're nasty women, or charmless women, androgenous creatures. They're pathetic.

Every day you get your Greeks, Trojans, Anthonies, your Nelsons, Gambettas, Boulangers, all ruining themselves on easy women like your Helens and your Cleopatras. Elizabeth, Catherine were geniuses because they were women. Mention of Louise Michel and women's congresses brought a smile to the face of a certain wretched journeyman tailor/dressmaker whose wife gave him regular thrashings.

And rightly so. How can his skilled labours be so underestimated! Its the same as a Bengal tigress wishing she had horns so she could take on hulky ox.

Ah, yes, oxen! And if we weren't oxen we'd happily leave all the work, the political bits and pieces in parliaments and assemblies and settle comfortably for being, as pure logic and our strong thighs dictate, well-trained ponies.

But we are oxen and much too amorous. Little wriggly feet, little white cheeks, or white breast . . Samson gets his locks cut off. Full marks to the devil.

Nothing like that happens to them.

I'm right at the edge of things --the 'Non plus extra' in the relationship.

She's quite proud of her boldness, as when she had, all on her own, given the cab-driver the address in Kurfurstenstrasse where she'd recently met her brother-in-law. She lied about everything when she got home. But she lied artistically, with relish, she gave unnecessarily complicated and lengthy accounts because she found lying fun, and because loved doing it.

"If you had to, could you put your hand on your heart and say there's nothing going on between us, truly nothing?"

No, there isn't, really.

.... "That's only because I have no option. I have to get married. But, Herri, I'm so mad about you!"

She then kissed me--almost passionately; yet there's not a trace of passion in her; if the slightest thing got in her way, she'd deny me thrice. It would just glide off her tongue! And if she then wanted rid of me, she'd be just as cold-blooded about it.

Not the least sign of any moral principle. Mind you, that's something I do admire about the female sex. Its the way they're able to snatch success from failure. We make the most pathetic mess of things. Gretchen, the penitent prisoner, Gretchen, the virtuous wife of some fat Hans,

would probably turn herself into a Martha and berate him with "Heinrich! I loathe you!" just as a pleasant reminder to herself of that warm, contented feeling she'd so enjoyed as a girl.

They're impressed if some sly, loose woman gets herself a prince, a good solid man, for her husband, and then goes and cheats on him.

Of the courtesan laden with diamonds, of the great actress with the reputation of a Messalina, of the empresss emotionally involved with a stable-lad, women want to know everything and more. They're lured by an amalgamation of jealousy and admiration. Yet a poor servant-girl who gets a child becomes destitute. Ugh! Women recoil.

That's being disloyal, and it goes on all the time.

The act of love is blessed. I don't include prostitution. I have no qualms there.

Underlying men's love one can also find naivety or arrogance. 'The morning after' is proverbial. The lecher has the added pleasure of destroying a life. Consequently my theory can perhaps be a theory of deterrence.

Actually we should consider the lightheartedness of undoubtedly "good" young ladies ("good", that is, without allusion to the Goethean sense).

I once knew a very sweet young lady. She was worried about 'the morning after'. She waited.

Morning brought the most beautiful sunshine and the birds sang joyously--and she laughed, and her face was picture: "I'm so happy, darling! I think I could fly."

That's how one is meant to feel.

I've just recently read a novel, a novel by a woman, 'a girl's story'. It almost moved me. Poor girl! She'd wanted to but hadn't dared because her fear of the black man was too great.

Equally ridiculous, I find, is the man who wants to be the very first. As the great, good and wise Goethe has his Jarno say: "Believe me, there is nothing in the world easier to cherish than a heart that is capable of love and passion. Whether they have been in love or are still in love, is neither here nor there.

Besides, one never is the first.

Is a woman in any way a better woman if she has abstained for the sake of personal privacy or through lack of opportunity, yet has let her imagination run riot with appallingly unnatural phantasies? is she better than the woman who perhaps on a bright May morning follows nature's urge without trying to analyse it or moralise upon it?

It's roughly how cowpox immunisation works. Maybe I've made a very good wife of my little Nixie.

Admittedly there are consequences.

I once had a woman friend whose spirit was strong though her flesh was weak. It was her contention that if there were no consequences then it was a party game.

Perhaps it's a good thing that things haven't yet got that far. You can still be acknowledged as the first; at the Registry Office you can get it stamped, you can be acknowledged the first for coming up with just the right thing, for raising the veil, for waking Sleepng Beauty.

She scoffs at that. There's a sort of resentment in her voice whenever she talks of her 'first'. Perhaps its a feeling of injustice that drove her into my arms, I being the knowing one, the condoning one.

" I would have been afraid of you. You know so much," she sometimes says.

"But aren't you afraid of him, your intended, him being so strange that you always have to put on an act?"

She comforts herself by thinking of the money, the carriages, the clothes.

Telling lies isn't a problem. They're brought up to lie.

There's so much they don't know about themselves. Again its the renowned and admired ability of their sex to survive.

He will always believe in her, will see only the whiteness of her brow through the stupidly good, healthy eyes of a yokel.

Poor chap, though, if he ever goes bankrupt!

Achim von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

My wedding! On the 24th July I am to be married. Midsummers Day! The day of the rose festival!--a wedding--a truly blessed occasion!--Do you know what it means? Who can know! Who can put it into words!

How I've managed to live before now I cannot comprehend. Such an egoist, so narrow. The dreams, the ideals, the thoughts all centred on the self ! I feel like a man who in the night realized the secret of life, was brought to life and is now alive.

And who has taught me this? A little, silent, marvellous, miracle, A tender, white young bud that has within it a dreamily innocent soul.

Mathilda! My maiden! My wife!

We speak of superior intellect, of cleverness, of achievements. Here is the key to the riddle: the blithe unawareness of loveliness.

Does she think and philosophise as I do? Naturally she has her own way of doing those things. She allows me to kiss her with my arms round her.

She's smiling. She's getting her dowry together.

How I love her beautiful confidence. It will be the same when she is wife and then mother; her skill will shine out. How much surer nature is in women. Maid--sweetheart--mother! We men go astray, besmirch our souls, desecrate our bodies, only to to kneel down humbly and with childlike stupidity before a gracious creature such as she: Take me! Teach me. Make me happy.

Whenever I visit her now I find her hidden among fine white linen and lace, and coloured silks. Ah, when I think that this blessed and mysterious confection will accompany the bride to her new home like a snow-white cloud wherein, yet to be unveiled, lie promises of delight, purity, tenderness. I hardly dare touch her with my rough fingers. What she intends to do is to me a sweet mystery, it makes me dream of the time when we were children when on holy feast days we'd receive presents, carefully wrapped and tied with ribbon, all to heighten the sweet tension and yearning.

She takes it very seriously and it appears to keep her occupied all the time. But I can see that it is earnestness that adds charm to this little person as she adorns herself. Am I not the one she is doing all this for? Is it not one of the most ancient of customs for the bride to

anoint and adorn herself, thus making the gift of her body even sweeter. There are those carping critics, women, who deny their natural calling, who inveigh against personal conceit, and who wish to introduce uniforms and traditional dress. Women simply give their own selves. Women's souls are wholly one at these moments with their bodies--bearers of life . . . They are for happiness, delight . . . beauty.

Wedding--sovereign occasion-- --That is how it feels with-in me.

She has an idea of the way I struggle with desires that sometimes tear me apart and that I drag out and devour like a wild animal . . . She is very composed, and is able to restrain all my wicked desires with the saintliness of her innocence. I am mild and obedient. It is she who sends me, like an eagle, to the heights of jubilation, she whom I would love to take in my arms and hold towards the sun.

Wedding--time of exultation!

My home is now decorated. Paperhangers and joiners have been busy for weeks. Mama has seen to all the arrangements. I have to excuse myself from all that, it's age and old ways. I'm to become a new man. It's good that everything is new.

The wedding is to take place here in Templin. All my tenants will be celebrating. They're already rehearsing for it. Same with the schoolmaster and the children. It's rumoured that the workers are planning something. Everywhere friendly looks. Ah, people are so good!

Perfect happiness reigns. Yes, angels exist. In four weeks time my angel will be wife.

How sweet it must be seeing life grow in her, the shining simplicity of nature's course--her life fulfilling her life.-- What is maiden and wife compared with mother? Is not mother the personification of all human virtues? Selflessness, goodness, endurance of sorrow . . .

My wife! My little mother!

She will be greeted like a little queen. Are we not then a little kingdom of our own, a complete world in miniature, whose model and providence she is? "Housefather and housemother", that lovely German concept. Here with us it can become reality.

So long as we have that, society will be safe and people will get along with one another; pure-minded wives and husbands who can make a home that believes in virtue.

Yes, that's aimed at you! Hence this nice, little request.
Come! You can't not be there. Come and behold a blissfully
happy man.

For once be glad yourself. Say: I can see happiness and I
believe in it.

And if my rapture makes you laugh, wait till you see
Mathilde in her wedding dress, all white with a crown of
white myrtle--and then you'll be like Thomas: Go now and
believe. Go and write a book of belief and love.

I have so much of it in me I really must pass some of it on
to you. I feel victorious as I proclaim the great teaching
about the world's joy--and the name of my Madonna is
Mathilda.

Another nice little thing about her in these days of dowry
hunters and upper-class coquettish mamas who lose no
time in training their half-grown daughters to be "a good
catch".

She recently received a draper's catalogue. It showed
examples of expensive lace that she liked.

Mama, understanding as always, gave her a smile and

advised something cheaper: "But that's for a princess, little one,--and you're a poor Privy Councillor's daughter."

Naturally I took care of it.

Mama took a fair amount of talking round. Her generosity to me is so endless. Shall these dear people suffer embarrassment economising and worrying while I feast myself!

They must begin to treat me as a son. I'm now one of the family. But what's the good of a bond of trust if I'm not allowed to share their burden? Do I deserve these good people? Am I making use of them? I would be happy with them under a thatched roof.

I'm glad I have money, for Mathilda's sake. It's something she first taught me to feel. It increases my power to please someone.

Sorry to go on so about this. You and I have so often quarrelled about the present-day value of money and the worship of money. Many a display of wealth testifies to what you say. I have known a few cases myself, and they left me feeling mistrustful and sad.

I know that being rich is not plain sailing.

She has no knowledge of money. Were she to have a hand full of money she would spread it about without a second thought, smiling and blessing. She shall remain free of money cares. Let the whole world chase and calculate she shall be the mute, immobile jewel at the heart of creation that is there to remind us of things everlasting and doesn't need to know the value of a hundred-Mark note.

The flower is sufficient unto itself. Poetry is meant to preserve; feelings to be pure.

We are simply us, man and wife. Around us, paradise. Come, you poor son of Adam who has lost his way, come and find repose in the shade of our palms.

T W E L F T H L E T T E R

Herbert Grondahl to Achim von Wustrow.

The dowry is an important affair. As it is "he" who is paying, let us, with all due gravitas, set to work.

My own blessed sacrament is simply: fashion magazines, catalogues and reports, Vienna and Paris modelling news.

We sit here very serious, Nixie and I, choosing: small pink silk blouse with valencienne lace, sweet light-blue drawers with bright heliotrope and light May green languette stitching.

Occasionally we're in doubt but she invariably accepts my more considered view.

She's then delighted: "You understand everything. 'He' would just as well have me in sackcloth. -- God! how will I cope when I no longer have you?"

Then she'll have a little weep. Next we go through the catalogue again and find something that's extra pretty, and very expensive, something that even Dada doesn't have. And that cheers us. O yes, 'he' will be paying.

Anyway, it's only right that he forks out for it--to make up for his ingratitude. Any man that can't see that his wife is attractive is a fool. She makes herself pretty for him. She takes trouble. And such trouble!-- just so that a little curl falls charmingly at just the right place on her forehead, or to have a tailored waist that's a good fit. How much thought and reflection, patience, sometimes pain, goes into it! -- How marvellous when it becomes a cast-off and she passes it on to someone who will value it more.

I know how to value things.

So we're completely happy. She turns herself round in front of me like a string puppet. When I think she looks pretty, she's happy.

"Nixie, you can't wear that. It doesn't suit you."

Then she's like a scolded child. But she always obeys. All women obey me because they feel I'm being impersonal, and they take pleasure in the knowledge that it's to their own advantage. I do believe that if I stepped in front of the Dowager Sultana: "Your turban a little towards the right, please" . . . she'd do it and express her gratitude. And she would be right to do so.

That's our virtue, us men of their world. And isn't it really the highest virtue of them all? Spinoza says: who doesn't love a person's faults, doesn't love the person! The most human of humanity are, for me, the women. I love them. I love their failings. They can tell. They go on loving me. They trust me.

It's quite unconscious: "You're so good," they sometimes say. Next they take hold of my hand and kiss it, almost passionately: "You are good."

There . . . there's that rancour again, that little, spiteful, perverse, feline hiss you hear in the "you".

"He's much better than me."

Is he really? I hardly think so. He should have given her a moral lecture and humiliated her and packed her and her messed up ideas back off home as the blessed Joseph did with memories for which had nothing but contempt. The French have a nice saying: 'There are some things that cannot be refused'. -- In other words he should have taken her, satisfied her lusts, and then tormented her by having a moral tomcat follow her to the image of the atoning Magdalena . . . So much for the virtues of this virtuous paragon.

Whenever she's before me, so white, so fine, so petite, the epitome of a water sprite, chattering merrily with me like a little bird about nasty things and good things . . I see her through my artist's eyes: nothing crude in her, no trace of the egotism you get in men, no hint of a sanctimonious destroyer.

And she jolly well knows it, little goose that she is. She's in love with me.

These days she'll often wax sentimental : "I can't live without you. I'd rather die!"

At times she's almost fierce: "I want to run away from home. What do I care? I'm going to stay here and never leave. You can do whatever you want with me."

She's careful to say it when she's drawn up facing me, nibbling macaroons, and then she waits furtively to see the effect. She would like it to be more than just an effect: better an outburst, a scene, a beast: man.

Then she plays the innocent: "It's nothing at all. Really I haven't done anything. No one can talk about 'us'."

She regards marriage as a huge sacrifice, a sacrifice that she's making, making for me. Little egoist! Meanwhile an altogether different thought has popped up in that small, precious brain of hers.

She'll miss my apartment: little Whippet, Martin, the coloured glassware . . Then she feels so sorry for herself. She gulps. However, that makes her nose red, and she's aesthetically alert.

The most compassionate women know to keep within limits: "My child, it doesn't suit you; your voice sounds

bad; you're ruining your hairstyle." They want to please, and so they should.

Will women's emancipation ever change things? The Middle-Eastern woman who anoints her body and adorns it with jewels is the simplest as well as being the grandest, the most ancient as well as being the the most modern of women.

The woman will adopt an air. She will give a smile . . . and if the man reciprocates, then he's all set. I've had that experience all too often.

I wouldn't have it otherwise. I'd just like more honesty! The lying gets to be so much and it's endless. It's a simple matter of 'those who excuse themselves, accuse themselves'. For instance the sensuous folds in all manner of renunciates' clothing. All women at some stage in their life want to go live in a nunnery. Why not include the strongest and most powerful of life's drives like hunger and thirst, ambition and weariness. There are those beautiful words which tell us that woman was created for man's joy and happiness. But she removes her glasses, and cuts off her hair, and becomes for him a source of ridicule, and for herself a hermaphrodite, an uncomprehended and incomprehensible creature.

I regret all the aberrations of our times, but mostly the fact that women are becoming dogmatic, logical, as a matter of principle. They'll be drafted into regiments and sworn in. The people who are the least sonny and sensuous brag about it. You yourselves withhold the lifeline. Decadent males participate.

But yet:

" 'tis one of heaven's greatest gifts
to hold such a dear thing in one's arms. "

Not only for us, but for itself also.

Where is the woman, that dear, loving woman, whose heart and mind is great enough to render bitter, misshapen fruit ripe and sweet? . . .

Every man regards her destined solely for him, an Adam's rib, the answer to his incompleteness. Only we who can truly love are able to see and value in her as her own creation, a matching, sympathetic human being.

May they fall into the trap! The 'blank sheet' is the greatest piece of outrageously male hypocritical cant that we hold to, deliberately and willingly. A creature whose eyes, ears, senses are a hundred times more finely tuned than ours, shall it not hear and feel like us?

Men's egoism makes them blind. I have no sympathy with egoists. Take the deceiving husband! He's rightly seen as being ridiculous and contemptible. If he was really living with his wife wouldn't he have endeavoured to get to know the way she thought down to her lies-- don't we all have our lies and hypocrisies?--were it to happen to him would he not have warned her, been able to intervene when there was still time, and if it couldn't be helped would he not have found it necessary to turn a blind eye?

If only we didn't all play roles. There's a man's role we particularly like playing, as opposed to the women's role which we imposed on them. Women avenge themselves as best they can.

What the world yearns for is not improvement but truth. Truth is what people care for most, in comparison with immorality, bad feeling, offensiveness, wickedness. And if comparison narrows, baseness gains. What is cheap, nasty? What is despicable? What is sublime, admirable? when all mankind is human.

A holy compassion lies pregnant above the world, the finest of the pure quintessence of Christ. It's only the Pharisee that gets in the way. And the tax-collector, of course.

Forgive the digression! I'll stop doing it. It's a German habit. 'The moral of the story'... --And it's a good way to behave because morals are everywhere, except, that is, where it's a matter of stick and carrot.

The day before yesterday we had our own farewell party.

She'd got herself looking very cute, making use of her new wardrobe for the first time: a greenish coloured shot-silk dress with a low neck.

"I've told Mama I'd be at Kathi's all evening, and I actually will go there."

I'd put roses everywhere. We drank champagne and ate tasty tidbits.

We were cheerful and jolly.

She sat on my knees: "Will you love me for ever, Herri? You won't ever forget me?"

A warmth came over me. Ah, Little Heart! Little Heart!

Then we began to recall all the things we'd shared, her first visit, our first kiss, all the secrecy, the sweetness... . every object in my room, Little Whip, the photographs,

the Bismarck . . .

" I will never, never forget it all" . . .

We were completely happy.

"It's like an island, as if I were at home. Ah, darling! . . .

She choked a little sob.

Morals again: "You don't think I'm bad, then?"

--Gretchen's old, sweet reassurance. They all do it. Then there's Daisy Grimme who makes things much worse.

"If only it were possible! If I could just stay with you today--and always!" . . .

"Now I have to go to that awful revolting ball--then tomorrow!!"-- -- --

Another flood of tears. She clung on my neck. Her face was all flushed. She kissed me.

"Truly, believe me, believe I'm in love with you. And only you!"

I believed. I believed everything she said.

"God! if we were the only ones on earth now! It would be paradise!" . . .

"Ah! life is so horridly tedious! . . . And you have burnt my letters, haven't you? All of them?" . . .

"Do you think we'll see eachother again? O God! How awful! They'd guess, I'd give it all away" . . .

"Not you, you'd be very sensible."

"And you, you'll have other women. You've not been altogether pleased with me. Tell me, have you've been a tiny bit fond of me? You're so immoral!"

Martin ordered the droschke.

I accompanied her.

As we passed we saw that every window above us was now lit up.

"If only it were possible now! You've not had me . . That hideous old man is the one who'll get me."

She knew exactly when the droschke would stop.

She said no more.

THIRTEENTH LETTER

Frau Mathilde von Wustrow to Herbert Grondahl.

My dear, sweet, heart's desire,
Imagine my fright when Achim came in with you! But I was
scared only for a moment. You're so understanding and
kind and good. Ah, the sweet, green glasses you sent me
as a wedding present! It was so like you, just too, too,
divine. I will never, never forget who they're from and I
will go on loving you for ever. From now on you must visit
us often, next summer when we'll be back home for good.
We're off now -- to Italy. Achim has given me a diamond
necklace. It's heavenly, I can tell you. --Talking of other
things, you must tell me who you're with now. You're so
discreet. Oh, if only you were Achim! Life can often be so
very hard.!

Did you think I looked good at the wedding ceremony?
The stupid assistant at the church arranged the train of
my dress all wrong. It bothered me throughout the whole
service and the myrtle came too far over my forehead.

P.S. Have you burnt the letters yet? And Martin's not

saying anything? That would be terrible.

Your M.